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LETTER DATED 31 JANUARY 1994 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to submit the attached response of my Government, dated 31 January 1994, to the letter of the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Ali Mohamed Osman Yassin, addressed to you (S/1994/71), dated 24 January 1994.

I should be grateful if Your Excellency could have this response circulated as a document Security Council.

(Signed) Ghirmai GHEBREMARIAM
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex

Response of the Government of Eritrea, dated 31 January 1994, to the letter of the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations to the President of the Security Council, dated 24 January 1994

A Sudanese popular proverb runs, "Al-ouzur azret mn'el zenb" to mean "the pretext is far worse than the original wrong done ...".

The reply that the National Islamic Front Government in the Sudan in its letter to the Security Council of 24 January 1994 (S/1994/71) has concocted to refute the complaint lodged by the Permanent Representative of Eritrea and the President of Eritrea reflects this proverb. A self-defence that is based on the blatant distortion of facts is fragile like a house of cards. It is especially unfitting when it comes from those who pose as the "Chosen messengers of God or Allah" to spread his word. But we are not surprised. We know full well the nature of the National Islamic Front and its Government.

The National Islamic Front's letter talks a lot about its commitment to fundament principles of international law (paras. 1 and 2). It also claims (para. 6) that the so-called "National Islamic Front" has long been dissolved. Again, this is like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. And though the National Islamic Front may believe otherwise, this gimmick, is too transparent for the neighbours of the Sudan, the countries of the Horn and for those in the international community who have been following events closely.

The accusations that the Eritrean Government has filed against the National Islamic Front Government are not rooted in innuendoes and rumours. Neither was its public action provoked by a single, isolated incident. The case is based on incontrovertible evidence accumulated over a long period of time. Details on specific acts were furnished to the National Islamic Front Government on several occasions in the past in the hope of seeking a remedy to the situation through bilateral dialogue and they can be made available to interested parties.

The National Islamic Front Permanent Representative talks about aid that his Government has extended to Eritrea. The letter states, "The Sudan has ... provided Eritrea with every material and political assistance ... we have helped to build the Eritrean State ..., we have helped ... agricultural development ... by providing 100 tractors" etc. The apparent objective is to portray the National Islamic Front Government as a benefactor of Eritrea and thereby to exonerate it from its misdeeds.

The truth of the matter is that the Eritrean Government too has in the past provided the National Islamic Front Government with considerable assistance both as a gesture of its goodwill and in accordance with its policy of promoting strong bilateral cooperation in the region. Naturally, it has received reciprocal assistance from the National Islamic Front Government. Full details of these transactions can be made available. The Eritrean Ministry of Agriculture did secure from its Sudanese counterpart 100 tractors on the basis of a long-term commercial loan just as, one might add, Khartoum owes the

Government of Eritrea a balance of 6 million United States dollars. But these are standard interactions which have no relevance to the issue at hand. Indeed, if we have gone out of our way to cite these details, it is only because we want to indicate that bilateral cooperation has not been a one-way traffic as the National Islamic Front letter seems to allude.

That successive Governments in the Sudan had often attempted to use the Eritrean struggle and the refugees they hosted as a bargaining chip with their neighbours and to serve their strategy in the region is a well-documented fact. In contrast, the generous and compassionate Sudanese people have throughout shown exemplary hospitality to their distressed Eritrean brothers. The Eritrean people know these facts full well and they are deeply grateful. Few would, however, be impressed if the National Islamic Front claims the credit for it now.

What one finds unpalatable is when the National Islamic Front Government, which is the primary cause for the large number of Sudanese refugees from the south as well as the north and that is ruthlessly exploiting the predicament of the Eritrean refugees to keep them as hostages and forcibly conscript them in its internal wars, poses as an advocate of refugee rights. In this regard, its attempts to question and cast doubts on the well-known policy and commitment of the Eritrean Government to the repatriation programme only betrays its hypocrisy.

We are, of course, prepared to listen if the National Islamic Front can produce or provide tangible information on the "opposition groups operating from within Eritrea itself ... long Red Sea coastline across which [they] may seek clandestine entry", as referred to in its letter. But we have full information about all those who were and are being trained and armed in the Sudan and who cross the border to destabilize our country. We have all the facts in this regard.

In conclusion, the Government of Eritrea wishes to remind the Security Council to take urgent and appropriate action so as the National Islamic Front Government in the Sudan desists from its acts of destabilization against the society and Government of Eritrea in contravention of international law, and stops its deplorable practices of forcible conscription of Eritrean refugees to fight its internal wars in violation of their basic human rights. We urge the Security Council to take necessary action without further delay. Time should not, indeed, be wasted in fruitless exchange of letters while the situation on the ground deteriorates.